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ABSTRACT

This paper summarizes teacher competencies in reading instruction, as defined in methods textbooks, curriculum guides, and reports by Harold A. Anderson, Robert L. Hillerich, Emma W. Rembert, the Illinois State University Department of Curriculum and Instruction, and the International Reading Association (IRA). Discussion focuses on four areas of teacher competency: general background, reading skills, instructional strategies, and measurement and evaluation. These categories are further divided into ten subtopics, such as reading and reading problems, motivational techniques, reading tests, and so on. (KS)

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WHAT SECONDARY TEACHERS SHOULD KNOW ABOUT THE TEACHING OF READING

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What Secondary Teachers Should Know About the Teaching of Reading

Teaching of reading is being considered as an important component of teacher preparation. More and more States are requiring prospective teachers to have at least one course as a part of their certification (Bader, 1975). Several writers have identified the competencies that secondary teachers should have in the area of reading instruction. Anderson (1948) lists eleven competencies which he considers essential for all teachers. The INTERNATIONAL Reading Association (1974) has published a report of the Commission on High Quality Teacher Education under the title Modular Preparation for Teaching Reading. This report identifies 17 areas of professional development for all teachers. Some of these areas are pertinent for secondary teachers in training. Hillerich (1974) prepared a list of competencies for reading specialists and included in it some competencies required of persons preparing for teaching at the secondary level. Illinois State University (1975) has published a Professional Sequence Guide for preservice secondary teachers which contains teacher competencies in certain areas of reading. Rembert (1975) prepared modules for teaching reading to prospective secondary teachers.

Teacher competencies in the above sources as well as in methods textbooks and curriculum guides were examined and grouped in 10 topics under four areas as follows:

1. General Background
2. Reading Skills
3. Instructional Strategies
4. Measurement and Evaluation

A description of these areas and the topics or sub-areas under each is provided below. The content and rationale for each sub-area is also included.

1. General Background: This area consists of (i) reading process and reading problems, and (ii) the general nature of the materials used at the secondary level. The former would include goals of the secondary programs, causes of low achievement and grouping techniques in reading. The latter would deal with the nature of expository materials and techniques for determining readability. The rational for each sub-area is provided below:

   a. Reading and Reading Problems: A teacher should be able to define reading. A definition serves as a focal point for selecting appropriate teaching strategies and evaluative measures (Spache and Spache, 1969). Although there are many definitions of reading, the current thinking is that reading is a communication process involving the interpretation of written or printed symbols (Goodman, 1970; Smith, F., 1971).

   A teacher should also have an understanding of the goals and objectives of the reading program. Such knowledge is essential in planning instruction. Evaluation of a program is also possible only when objectives have been identified. A large number of students in secondary schools are reading below their expected level. Allen (1969) points out that

one out of every four students nationwide has significant reading deficiencies. An understanding of those causes related to reading, for example, lack of basic skills or lack of motivation, is essential for a teacher if he/she wants to improve this situation. The range of reading ability in a typical classroom is two-thirds the median chronological age of students in that class (Burmeister, 1973). Such background information helps the teacher plan strategies for meeting individual needs. One way to meet these differences is through grouping activities. A teacher should know what criteria to use for grouping students for instructional purposes.

b. Nature of Materials: The expository materials used at the secondary level are more difficult than the narrative materials that students read in the elementary grades. The teacher should have an understanding of the factors that make the material difficult. He/she should also know some techniques to estimate the readability of materials to be used for independent and instructional purposes.

2. Reading Skills: The heart of a good reading program is the development of reading skills. A teacher should be able to help students develop word recognition skills, vocabulary, comprehension, and study skills. Further description of these sub-areas is provided below:

a. Word Recognition and Vocabulary: Some students in junior and senior high schools do not possess even the basic word recognition skills--phonics and structural analysis--considered essential to become an independent reader (Karlin, 1972; Marksheffel, 1966). A secondary teacher should have knowledge of these skills so that he/she can help students in need of these skills. Many boys and girls in secondary grades do not know how to use context clues to derive the meanings of unknown words. Morton (1964) found that the fast readers tend to use context clues more often than the average or slow readers. Teachers should know the various ways in which context clues can be used to increase independence in reading.

Another problem that students encounter in their reading is the connotative and figurative expressions that they do not understand. Burmeister (1973: 123-124) states that "the language of the poet or other literary writers, as well as the language of many social scientists and newspaper writers, is intended to sway our feelings or to convince us of a particular point of view." The teacher's task in such cases is to help students understand the use of such language and provide them with practice in writing messages using words that convey positive, negative, or neutral meaning according to the purpose of their communication. Sometimes, a teacher uses such an activity

from a workbook but cannot tell what its purpose is. He/she should be able to identify the skill that students would learn from this type of assignment.

b. Comprehension: Comprehension is the major goal of reading instruction. Dechant (1973) states that comprehension takes place when a reader brings meaning to get meaning out of a printed page. This implies that a teacher should provide appropriate experiences to the reader so that reading becomes meaningful to him/her. A teacher should understand the importance of background experiences as a factor in cognitive and affective learning. Certain words (signals) in a passage may help a reader see the relationships between ideas expressed in that selection. Language signals may alert the reader to a sequence of events, comparison-contrast, or a cause-and-effect relationship implied by the writer (Karlin, 1972). The teacher should be aware of common language signals and should be able to identify the relationships they might suggest. Another technique for improving comprehension is setting a purpose for reading. A teacher should be familiar with the techniques to assist students in setting their purposes for reading.

Comprehension has several levels (Smith, N.B., 1963; Smith and Barrett, 1974; Wallen, 1972). A teacher should be familiar with these levels and should be

able to differentiate between various levels of questions he/she can use to develop literal and higher levels of comprehesnion.

c. Study Skills: Following directions is an important skill for a competent reader. A teacher should be able to detect a student who is weak in this skill, only then he/she can provide an instructional sequence to remove this deficiency.

Flexibility of speed is also important for a mature reader. A teacher should know that reading speed depends upon such factors as the purpose for reading, difficulty level of the material, experiential background of the reader and his/her motivation for reading. The teacher who understands this would be able to encourage students to become flexible readers who can change gears in reading as they would in driving an automobile.

Related with the speed of reading are two specific skills of skimming and scanning. Again, the teacher should know the difference between the two and situations in which each would be appropriate to use.

A good reader also uses certain techniques to read textbooks effectively. Such techniques have been described by Fay (1965), Pauk (1969), Robinson (1961) and Spache (1963). Some understanding of these techniques would enable a teacher to explain and demonstrate them to students.

3. Instructional Strategies: One of the major causes of low achievement in reading is that the teacher does not base his/her instruction on the abilities, needs, and interests of the students. A teacher should, therefore, understand the techniques of motivation. He/she should also know how to plan an effective lesson.

Following is a further description of these sub-areas:

a. Motivational Techniques: Lack of motivation is a common cause for poor performance by students. They are turned off for a variety of reasons. Strang et al. (1967) suggest that one of the teacher's most important tasks is to develop in his/her pupils an interest in reading. They also suggest techniques that a teacher can use to motivate students. The teacher should be well aware of the role of motivation in learning.

b. Lesson Plan and Study Guides: An effective teacher knows how to plan his/her lesson. A planned lesson consists of a sequence of activities aimed at achieving the objectives of the lesson.

A teacher may also use study guides to assist students in overcoming some of the difficulties they encounter in reading. Karlin (1972) suggests that one part of the guide may focus on the process or reading skills to be used and the other part may deal with the content or the information to be mastered. Herber (1970)

calls the first part as reading guide and the second part as reasoning guide. Both authors describe how a teacher can prepare such guides to help students. A teacher should be familiar with the purpose of study guides and should know how they are constructed.

c. Measurement and Evaluation: Evaluation is an integral part of the teaching-learning process. Teachers must determine the strengths and weaknesses of their students and use this information for providing appropriate instruction. In order to do this, they have to know well the principles and techniques of evaluation, both formal and informal, and also the advantages and disadvantages of various instruments.

Specific sub-areas under this would include:

a. Reading Tests: Teachers need to have some familiarity with standardized tests in common use and the criteria used in selecting them (Karlin, 1972). If a teacher uses a standardized test for his/her class, he/she will have to score the test and interpret the class performance in terms of the mean, median, standard deviation, etc. A knowledge of these basic statistical concepts is, therefore, necessary for a teacher. The latest trend in measurement is the use of criterion-referenced tests (Prescott, 1971). The teacher should know what kinds of tests these are and how they are different from the standard-

ized or norm-referenced tests. He/she should also be able to identify the purposes for which these tests are used and how performance standards are established in such tests.

b. Informal Techniques: In addition to the tests, informal measures, such as the informal reading inventory (IRI) and the cloze procedure, are also used to determine the strengths and weaknesses of students (Aukerman, 1972; Burmeister, 1973; Burron and Claybaugh, 1973; Karlin, 1972). The teacher should be knowledgeable about the information that an IRI and cloze technique can provide. Such information will be useful in grouping students for skill development, recreation reading, and other activities.

c. Test Interpretation: A teacher should not only be familiar with the assessment instruments but should also be able to interpret the results. An effective follow-up is possible when correct interpretation of test results is made. A teacher should know that a score in isolation does not mean much and instruments contain measurement errors which have to be taken into consideration when interpreting test scores.

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